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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SINGAPORE 002073

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SUBJECT: VISIT BY SEN. CLINTON TO SINGAPORE (JULY 5-7)

Classified By: Amb. Franklin L. Lavin. Reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

11. (C) Summary: Singapore's senior leadership discussed the challenges of combating Islamic terrorism, the need for moderate Muslims to speak out, and the importance of success in Iraq in meetings with visiting Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY). GOS leaders told the Senator that cross-Strait relations were calmer than last year. While China did not want a collision with the United States, it could not allow Taiwan to pursue independence. At the same time, they urged the United States to continue to play a major role in Asia since it was the only country capable of balancing China's rising power. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong encouraged the U.S. military to be more engaged with its regional counterparts. PM Lee also reviewed Singapore's border controls and immigration policies. End Summary.

12. (U) Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-NY) visited Singapore from July 5-7. She was accompanied by staff member Huma Abedin. The Senator met with Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, Senior Minister Goh Chok Tong, and Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew on July 5. Rep. Charles Rangel (D-NY) also participated in the three meetings.

Islamic Radicalism and Iraq

13. (C) The problem of Islamic terrorism would not be easily extirpated, observed MM Lee. While Muslims in Southeast Asia were traditionally moderate and tolerant, they had been affected by radicalism emanating from Middle East and the spread of wahhabism from Saudi Arabia. Singapore's Muslim leaders were rational and educated in English and the GOS kept a limit on madrassah-based education. He stressed that moderate Muslims had to be encouraged to stand up and speak out against radicalism. They needed confidence that they could win. We could get to the tipping point, noted MM Lee, but he didn't know how long it would take.

14. (C) MM Lee said Islamic terrorists would continue to use violence until shown that their methods would not succeed. If they were successful in Iraq, they would try to topple secular governments in other countries, such as Indonesia. PM Lee said Singapore supported U.S. efforts in Iraq; it was important to get the Iraqi government working, with a security force that could take over from U.S. forces and fend for itself.

15. (C) Asked by Rep. Rangel how organized terrorists were internationally, MM Lee responded that orthodox Islam was a powerful force capable of recruiting volunteers for terrorist groups. He noted Singapore's experience in 2001 and 2002 in dealing with Jemaah Islamiyah's terrorist plots in Singapore and characterized Islam as a "venomous religion."

Democracy and Islam

16. (C) SM Goh told the Senator that democracy and Islam were compatible. It was necessary, however, to first carry out economic and social reforms to prepare the ground for democracy -- such as empowering women and encouraging education. Democracy was not just elections. He noted that some Middle Eastern countries had been looking at Singapore as a model for economic development. Many of these countries also preferred the "Singapore model" of democracy to that of the United States, given the ruling People's Action Party's consistent electoral success. MM Lee questioned the wisdom of pushing hard for greater democracy in Egypt. He urged a more gradual political opening to avoid ending up with a government like in Iran. Do not be dewy-eyed about the situation, he admonished, since one man, one vote would put the radicals in charge of Egypt.

Cross-Strait Relations

17. (C) SM Goh commented that cross-Strait relations were calmer than last year, due to the joint U.S.-Japan security statement in February, China's Anti-Secession Law, and the visits by Taiwan opposition leaders to China. The PRC leadership had become more flexible and subtle in its approach to Taiwan, SM Goh argued. President Hu Jintao was more patient about Taiwan and was willing to put the issue aside for a decade or more.

18. (C) China had no interest in a collision with the United States, according to MM Lee. The PRC wanted peace and stability so it could concentrate on promoting economic growth, which was critical to the regime's legitimacy. The one issue they could not overlook was Taiwan. While China supported the status quo, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) would continue its build up to dominate the Taiwan Strait to deter the United States from getting involved in any cross-Strait conflict.

U.S. Role in Asia -----

19. (C) All three GOS leaders urged the United States to continue to play a major role in Asia. MM Lee commented that the United States was the only power capable of balancing the rising power of China. SM Goh observed that India had to become more involved in the region as well to balance China. Singapore wanted all outside powers to be active in Asia so that "no dominant country could call the shots for its neighbors."

110. (C) Noting that he had attended the Army Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth, PM Lee urged the U.S. military to be more engaged with its counterparts in the region, especially Indonesia and Pakistan. The Indonesian Armed Forces (TNI) had been cut off for a long time. The United States was fortunate to have invested in the right friend in President Yudhoyono, according to PM Lee.

Regional Situation -----

111. (C) The regional situation had improved over the last year, according to SM Goh. Indonesia had conducted successful elections and President Yudhoyono understood the West and could reach out to it. He was a decent man who was taking action against corruption, but the problem was endemic in Indonesia. In Malaysia, the change in prime minister was for the better. SM Goh commented that former PM Mahathir enjoyed fighting with everyone. The long-term problem was what type of Islam would dominate in Malaysia. He expressed concern that a more radical version of Islam was gaining ground and forcing moderates to take more extreme positions.

Border Controls and Immigration -----

112. (SBU) Asked about Singapore's border control system, PM Lee said it helped that Singapore was an island. While some people were able to sneak into the country, it was far easier to control than the Rio Grande. Rep. Rangel noted that Singapore's sanctions for illegal immigrants were different than in the United States and PM Lee noted that they were caned and then deported. Employers and landlords of illegal immigrants also faced sanctions. The GOS was experimenting with biometrics to speed up the entry process, especially for the tens of thousands of people entering from Malaysia every day.

113. (SBU) While unemployment was 3.9 percent, there were many jobs that Singaporeans no longer wanted to do, such as in construction and domestic positions, observed PM Lee. The GOS allowed in some 200,000 workers in these fields. The GOS, however, did not want these workers to "establish roots" in Singapore and encouraged turnover. At the same time, the GOS was trying to attract skilled workers, notably scientists and engineers, to come and stay in Singapore. They were needed to help offset Singapore's low birth rate and to help the country develop new industries, such as its emerging biotechnology sector.

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